

# VantagePoint

JANUARY – FEBRUARY 2012

## New in 2012 – ONLINE Defensive Driving Class

Pierce Transit Vanpool just made it a whole lot easier to become a volunteer vanpool driver: We proudly announce our new ONLINE defensive driving class!

Driver applicants, you can now attend defensive driving class from the comfort of your home, at a time convenient for you. (You can even wear your PJ's to class.) Our new online class is interesting, informative, and just as thorough as our onsite class – you can even go back and review sections that interest you.

Here's how it works:

1. Complete the driver application packet and return it to Pierce Transit.
2. Kick back and wait for us to review the completed packet, obtain your motor vehicle record, and send you Pierce Transit policy information.
3. Read and sign the document we give you. Kick back again and wait for us to give you a key code to access the online training.
4. Attend our virtual class and take the online test within two weeks.
5. Relax some more while we receive your test grade and then notify you that you're approved to drive!

Fast. Easy. Convenient. *Way to GO!*

## Vanpool Appreciation

Nothing starts a new year off better than being appreciated. Very recently, one vanpool rider appreciated his drivers by giving each of them a \$25 gift card to either Applebee's or Olive Garden. The vanpool driver's response: "I think it's pretty cool that riders show appreciation to their drivers for ensuring the van runs to and from our place of employment. From my perspective, it's nice to know the riders appreciate what we do." We couldn't agree more!

And here's a compliment PT Vanpool staff received this week: "I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you. The vanpool has been a positive and beneficial experience. You guys are awesome!"

While we're on the subject, we at Pierce Transit Vanpool appreciate ALL of our drivers and bookkeepers. THANK YOU for helping keep our vanpool program running smoothly and volunteering your time and effort so all vanpoolers can benefit.

Vantage Point is a publication of Pierce Transit.

EDITORS: Heidi Hunter [hhunter@piercetransit.org](mailto:hhunter@piercetransit.org) | Kim Pontsler [kpontsler@piercetransit.org](mailto:kpontsler@piercetransit.org) | Lynne Cunningham [lcunningham@piercetransit.org](mailto:lcunningham@piercetransit.org) Please consider the environment before printing this newsletter.



## Resolve to Avoid Fixed Object Accidents in 2012

The good news: PT Vanpool has an outstanding safety record – so much so, that our insurance carrier touts us as a “model vanpool program for the rest of the 20-plus vanpool programs” in Washington State. Hats off to you, vanpool drivers!

The bad news: That said, there is always room for improvement, and we have identified our fixed object accidents as exactly that. These accidents are the most common type of vanpool accident – in 2011, 57% of all PT vanpool accidents involved hitting fixed objects. Nearly half of *those* involved backing into posts, fences, walls, and parked vehicles.



The best news: Since those darned fixed objects aren't moving, they're also easy to avoid! Check out these simple pointers . . .

- **Remember your pre-trip inspection.** As you approach your van before the commute, do a complete walk-around. Look for possible hazards under and around the vehicle, and note the amount of maneuvering room available. Even do a quick “pre-trip” when preparing to leave a gas station or parking lot – common sites of fixed object accidents.
- **Scan ahead.** Be alert to small spaces and tight squeezes, curbs and other obstacles the van could contact if you turn a corner too sharply. Constantly check your clearances.
- **Avoid backing when possible.**
- **DO back into parking stalls.** Backing into a space is safer than backing out.
- **Use a spotter.** Can't see? Have someone get out and help. Remember to agree on hand signals.
- **Go slow.**
- **Get out and check, if no spotter is available.**

If, despite precautions, you are involved in an accident, please call 9-1-1 to report the accident, and request that law enforcement come to the accident scene. Report the accident immediately to your vanpool coordinator, and submit completed accident report(s), camera and/or accident photos, and courtesy cards to Pierce Transit within 24 hours of the accident.

Thanks for taking these steps to help make our program even safer.

# COMMUTING NEWS



## Vanpool: Your Prescription for a Healthier 2012

You already know there are many benefits to vanpooling: This commute mode is a monetary, environmental and social win-win. But did you also know that vanpooling decreases stress?

Chronic stress can weaken your immune system, making you more susceptible to common illness like cold and flu. Stress also exacerbates the following health problems:

- Pain
- Heart disease
- Digestive problems
- Sleep problems
- Depression
- Obesity
- Autoimmune diseases

The camaraderie of a vanpool actually *reduces* stress. Once you and a fellow rider have dissected the Seahawks' best (or worst) plays of the weekend, or discussed last night's episode of *Dancing with the Stars*—please believe—you are no longer a stranger to them. Camaraderie is good for us, plain and simple.

Not quite ready to be social at the beginning of your work day? That's okay—catching a few more winks or reading that interesting novel are just what the doctor ordered, as well. Either way, you are arriving at work in a better frame of mind than if you drove alone.

Of course, vanpooling also creates a bonus for employers: Employees who vanpool are more productive at work, as they take fewer sick days and are more likely to feel healthy.

So hooray for vanpooling! It makes you feel better...literally.

*Adapted from "Decrease Your Stress By Carpooling" on PlanetGreen.com.*

## Transit Tax Benefit Update

Heads up! The transit pass and vanpool tax benefit of \$230/month that was set up under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) expired at the end of 2011. The benefit amount reverted back to \$125, effective January 1, 2012.

There is some speculation that in March, Congress **may** reconsider this decision. If you're interested in or affected by this issue, you may wish to [check out the IRS website](#) for more info, or [contact your congressman](#) or one of the organizations working on this matter. Such groups include the [Association for Commuter Transportation](#) (ACT) and [Commuter Benefits Work for Us](#).

## Vanpool Photos



Beautiful, isn't it?

This shot of Mt. Rainier is courtesy of vanpooler Tom, who found it on KOMO's website. It captures the natural beauty of our state, which vanpooling helps preserve by reducing pollution and the need for new roads.

Got a vanpool-related photo? We'd love to publish it in our newsletter! Please email it to [vanpool@piercettransit.org](mailto:vanpool@piercettransit.org).



# News & Reminders



## VANPOOL

**24/7 Emergency**  
253.381.3762

**Direct Line**  
253.983.3377  
7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

**Fleet Supervision**  
253.905.5306  
7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

**Vanpool Fax**  
253.984.8227

[Vanpool@piercetransit.org](mailto:Vanpool@piercetransit.org)

## RIDESHARE

**1.888.814.1300**  
[RideshareOnline.com](http://RideshareOnline.com)

## PIERCE TRANSIT

**Customer Services**  
253.581.8000

**Toll Free**  
1.800.562.8109

**TDD Customer Service**  
253.582.7951

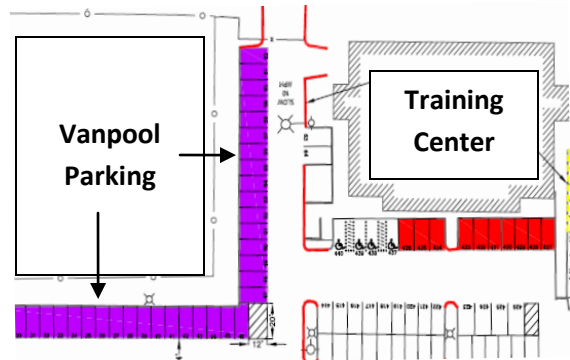
[Piercetransit.org](http://Piercetransit.org)



## Swapping Vans for Service

### Where (and how) you should park the van

When dropping off your van for service, please be sure to **back** your van into a **vanpool** parking space (see purple area in diagram). Be aware of van overhang and surroundings.



Although you may see vans parked in other areas, please be sure to park in designated vanpool parking stalls only. Thanks!

## Current Pierce Transit Vanpools

### Verifying group information

We keep a list of [current vanpools](#) online so folks searching for a smart commute can find you. Vanpool primary drivers and public contacts: If you have a moment (you might if you're reading this), please find your group on the list and ensure your work hours, contact, and other info are shown correctly. If we need to update, please let us know. Gratz!

## Out with the Old, In with the New

Friendly reminder: Please remove and recycle your van's 2011 insurance card, and ensure the 2012 card that we sent is now in the van.



If you work in Pierce County and use a smart commute at least six times between February 6–24, you could win a weekend getaway to Portland, Oregon on Amtrak, or one of many other fabulous prizes!

You must commute to a worksite located in Pierce County (**partnering** Pierce Trips employers only) and log your trips on the [Pierce Trips Commute Calendar](#) to be eligible for prizes. Start planning now!